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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000159

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DEPT FOR EUR (A/S FRIED, DAS DICARLO), EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV EAID KDEM UNMIK VI

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF A/S FRIED TO KOSOVO FROM MARCH 6-8, 2007

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Status fever continues to grip all residents of Kosovo, with ethnic Albanians focused on the conclusion of the Ahtisaari process and Serbs grimly wondering how they will cope once the outcome is clear. With careful management and assiduous courting of both Albanian and Serb leaderships, we have kept tensions under control and the Unity Team intact -- despite the delay in the status process beyond the end of 2006 and the troubling appearance of radical Albanian protestors bent on causing havoc and disrupting international negotiations on Kosovo. The presentation of Ahtisaari's plan to the United Nations will edge nervousness even higher, and could prompt a political declaration from Kosovo's northern Serb leadership disavowing the settlement altogether. Key to maintaining stability through all this will be resolute and proactive leadership from Unity Team members -- a role they are frankly unused to playing, and one that needs constant bolstering from the U.S. government. Your visit will help convince Kosovo Albanians that the long road to status is nearing the final mark, but only -- only -- if they play their part and ensure an end to violence. With Kosovo Serbs, you can inject a note of reality on the likely outcome of the Ahtisaari process, but assure them again of our intent to support them both financially and politically after status is determined. End summary.

Anxieties Building

¶2. (C) With UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari having pledged publicly to bring his proposals to the United Nations by mid-to-late March, anxieties among Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo are building, though for markedly different reasons. Albanians remain invested in the status process begun many months ago, but worry -- with reason -- that the Moscow/Belgrade axis could stymie an early UNSC resolution and wonder where that will leave them. They also harbor suspicions that some of the provisions of the Ahtisaari document will unduly benefit Serbs and sustain the bifurcated nature of Kosovo's existing institutional framework, though a USOP-sponsored public outreach effort and meticulous choreographing of the Unity Team's initial response to Ahtisaari's presentation has helped ease those fears

considerably. Secure in the knowledge that the Ahtisaari process continues to move forward, Kosovo Albanians have shown no inclination to back the extremist "Self-Determination Movement" led by Albin Kurti; no more than a couple thousand people augmented the SDM ranks during the February 10 demonstration (mainly out of curiosity -- most dispersed with the tear gas), and even the subsequent and deeply regrettable deaths of two protestors at police hands did not provoke a general outcry or massive negative response.

¶3. (C) The Serb community in Kosovo remains torn between wanting to believe that resolution of status will be blocked in the UNSC and facing the possible ramifications of a decision in favor of independence. In this, as always, the yawning divide is between Serbs in the north and Serbs in the south. The northern Serb leadership, tied uneasily to Belgrade but by no means completely under Belgrade's sway, is making its preference more and more obvious -- a partition of the northern municipalities and north Mitrovica from the rest of Kosovo, no matter what the consequences for Serb communities south of the Ibar. Though the likes of Marko Jaksic and Milan Ivanovic have denied this publicly, Serb officials in the south have no illusions about the ultimate aims of their northern colleagues, and they suspect strongly that Belgrade is either tacitly or explicitly encouraging these objectives. (The fact that, according to local reports, numerous empty buses were sent down from Serbia to transport northern Serbs to Belgrade for February 28th's demonstration in front of the U.S. Embassy only reinforces southern Kosovo Serb beliefs that the Serbian government and northern Kosovo leaders are in cahoots on policy goals.) Equally mistrustful of the Kosovar Albanians, southern Serbs feel abandoned and afraid, engaging with international

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community representatives in an attempt to protect their communities and property in Kosovo. USOP has used multiple opportunities to reach out to Serbs in both northern and southern Kosovo, and your visit will provide another chance to spread the message of USG support and assistance.

Your Message

¶4. (C) The next few weeks, without exaggeration, will be the most critical ones in Kosovo's recent history. It rests almost solely in Kosovar hands not to jeopardize the months (and indeed years) of effort that have gone into the status process, and they must accept this responsibility without reserve. In your discussions with the President, Prime Minister and Unity Team, you can stress that it is not enough to simply respond to events; they must drive public opinion and tackle the most difficult issues before/before they become a problem. Insufficient attention to the SDM threat and a failure to condemn the movement's activities before the February 10 demonstration was a key contributor to the violence that ensued. The Unity Team has proven more stable (with much massaging from USOP) than we might have deemed possible months ago, but it needs to be more than just a marriage of convenience among disparate political leaders -- its members must take ownership of this process, rather than finger point or lay the blame at the international community's door when the glare of the public spotlight is upon them (as, for example, the Prime Minister chose to do in contesting the package's treatment of the Macedonia border issue or the provisions dealing with the stand-up of a new Kosovo Security Force).

¶5. (C) With your Serb interlocutors, your message can be at once direct and sympathetic. Meeting Kosovo's northern Serb mayors -- who are wholly beholden to their hardline leadership -- you can stress our intent to keep an open channel of communication, but underscore again our redlines: Kosovo must remain peaceful; no violence can occur against Albanians or international representatives; police must remain under KPS uniform; and any declarative political

statements must be just that -- declarative. To act otherwise would be to risk an elevated international response by either KFOR or UNMIK, something neither they nor we desire. Your interaction with Serbs in the south will be of a quite different character: you will see Father Sava -- an absolutely critical partner for the USG, and one we have cultivated by taking up his monastery's case repeatedly against hostile local officials -- at Decani monastery; you will visit Partesh, an area outside Gjilan/Gnilane and in the U.S. KFOR AOR destined to become a new Serb-majority municipality under the Ahtisaari plan; and you will speak with a Serb media outlet that broadcasts its interviews via a network of local stations in Kosovo. You will also have a chance to visit Camp Nothing Hill, KFOR's outpost in northern Kosovo, where U.S. troops are serving on a month's rotation. We hope your visit will afford you a better appreciation of the views and concerns on all sides, but even more, that your voice will provide needed reassurance to Serbs and Albanians that we can fruitfully address their respective needs -- as long as both respect the limits of international tolerance and the norms of acceptable behavior.

¶6. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina does not clear this cable for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW